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ABSTRACT

The annual report of the Executive Director of the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools is presented. The problem of a lack of commitment to equity in the recruitment of minority students and the employment of minority faculty and staff by many institutions is noted. It is recommended that colleges pay serious attention to the decline in numbers of 18-22 year olds and be careful about expansion into graduate programs, adult and continuing education on- and off-campus, and the development of computer science programs. In their reports for 1983-1984, evaluation teams have been critical about advising, counseling, and placement. Consideration is also given to: the rising number of part-time faculty; the continued politicization of boards of trustees; policies for systematically collecting important documents and records; theological education, state relations, Council on Postsecondary Accreditation; study abroad; and policy review. Work performed by and for the Commission on Higher Education and developments in accreditation are also summarized. (SW)

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TRANSITION OR TRANSFORMATION?
Annual Report of the Executive Director of the Commission on Higher Education
1983-84

Repetition, we are told, is an effective form of teaching, yet as one nineteenth century English sage observed, "those great ideas which cheer men [and women] in their direst struggles are not things which they are likely to inflict by frequent repetition upon those they live with."[1] Inevitably, certain ideas, great and small, recur, and so the challenge is to write an annual report which occasionally repeats without seeming repetitive, which strives for concinnity and seeks to capture "all the charm of all the Muses often flowering in a lonely word."[2] The generous response to previous annual reports sustains and encourages this year's effort.

Whether higher education is in a stage of transition or (more dramatically) is undergoing transformation will be clearer to historians a few years hence. If the intensity of the Commission's work since July 1, 1983 is any indication, certainly the scale and tempo of activity in higher education have heightened and quickened. The Commission's three field staff members made a total of 189 campus visits during that period. Evaluation teams went to 83 campuses, 23 Periodic Review Reports were acted upon, and 128 follow-up reports were received and reviewed. Additional direct contact with constituents was provided by sub-regional one-day meetings in Albany, Baltimore, Harrisburg, Princeton, and San Juan, Puerto Rico. Representatives from more than 400 Middle States institutions as well as from state agencies had opportunities to meet and talk with Commission members and staff.

In light of the foregoing, our knowledge of the condition of higher education in the Middle States region can hardly be dubbed superficial. It is with reasonable confidence, then, that the following observations are made in the hope they will be helpful to institutions regardless of whether they are in transition or are being transformed.

Women and Minorities

National commitment to protect and promote the rights and opportunities of women and minorities has clearly diminished. What is deeply distressing is the fact that colleges and universities have followed the trend. Associate Director Minna Weinstein notes in her own annual report:

> I don't think I could have foreseen the eagerness with which collegiate institutions have joined the retreat [from the principles of affirmative action]. The most surprising aspect has been the attitude toward minority students. We have all been aware that those responsible for hiring of faculty and staff, in particular faculty search committees, would likely drag their feet in the hiring of women and minority people, but I doubt that most of us anticipated the seeming reluctance to bring minority young people into the student body.

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Associate Director Howard Simmons observes in his report:

> There is a lack of commitment to equity in the recruitment of minority students and the employment of minority faculty and staff in a large percentage of institutions visited. While colleges and universities seem eager to point to compliance reviews by state and federal agencies, an eyeball check of the situation will demonstrate that few minority persons are in evidence on many of the campuses. In effect, more attention is being given to legalistic affirmative action and bureaucratic paperwork than to real enrollment and employment equity for Blacks and Hispanics. Colleges and universities must be disabused of the notion that all minority persons represent a singular set of characteristics or even a common philosophy about education.

It was an unusual evaluation team report this past year which didn't comment in a similar vein.

Yet sophistry and insouciance invariably characterize institutional responses to criticism or suggestions on the subject. The majority of institutions is now coeducational, and many became so to enhance the quality of students. To argue that women candidates for faculty or administrative positions are neither available or qualified is simply dishonest. But administration after administration remains all male and so do many academic departments as well. "It's more comfortable that way" was the privately expressed reason of one department chair. And when a prestigious private institution recently selected a man instead of a woman from the two finalists for the presidency, an influential trustee was quoted as saying "I just couldn't see her sitting beside the coach at a football game"!

With respect to minorities at the faculty and administrative levels, the problem is more serious because of shortages, although even there it is sometimes exaggerated. What this emphasizes, however, is the desperate need to recommit ourselves to the education of minority youth so that the pool of talent and training will continually expand. New working relations between colleges and schools, admission of groups of students from the same school, more attention to academic than to athletic prowess, willingness to take risks at the admissions end without sacrificing rigor in the graduation requirements; these are only some of the obvious approaches to a complex problem.

The fact is simply and sadly that the academic community passively acquiesces in a situation which has worsened rapidly and steadily since 1980. What we are dealing with, after all, are not women's or minorities' rights but human rights. If our colleges and universities and especially their leaders are not actively committed to advancing those rights, what indeed is democracy's future?

Other Team Findings

Head-in-the-sand continues to characterize the posture of too many institutions with regard to the demographic data confronting higher education. At a point when the decline in 18-22 year olds is really going to effect enrollments, many colleges and universities believe that having experienced no fall-off in enrollment since the hullabaloo began a few years back, that it was just that – hullabaloo.

Virtually every evaluation team this year has raised serious questions about enrollment projections and budgets. The prospects loom most ominously for smaller, private colleges, but all except the most prestigious public and private institutions will begin to see full-time enrollments drop, with inevitable implications for budgets, faculty, and realistically, entire institutions. It does not appear to be acceptable on most campuses to consider the possibility that smaller may be better. A look at some of the units of the City University of New York, e.g. Brooklyn College which dropped from over 30,000 students to less than half that number, might be instructive.

Instead, expansion is still seen as the panacea – graduate programs, adult and continuing education on and off-campus, and of course computer science as the ultimate, ultimate solution. Without carefully reviewing their mission and goals and realistically assessing their resources, small undergradutate colleges are plunging into graduate programs in what

appears to be both reckless and feckless fashion. Faculty qualifications and library and laboratory resources are frequently marginal at best, and when the programs are off-campus services and supervision are minimal. The proliferation of MBA programs has required the Commission's attention for several years, but the multiplication of other types of post-baccalaureate degree programs is now a major agenda issue. Joint explorations will be undertaken with COPA and the Council of Graduate Schools to determine effective approaches to a development that potentially could undermine the quality and integrity of all graduate degrees.

Continuing and adult education activities, numerous as they are, still not fully integrated into the totality of most institutions' concerns. Even where they are conducted entirely on campus they are frequently viewed as an appendage. Directors of continuing education have been growing steadily in terms of professional competence and experience, yet too often they are overlooked in policy making and planning and lack clout in budget preparation. As more institutions look to continuing and adult education to bolster sagging enrollments, they will need to become more sensitive to the needs and differences of such education and to its implications for community-public relations. Potentially, it could become the largest and most important aspect of American higher education, but not if it is merely exploited for financial gain.

As adult education and life-long learning become increasingly important segments of higher education, we may need to break away from the traditional categorization of students as two-year, four-year, graduate, part-time, or full-time. Budgets and student aid are frequently geared to such categories, and full-time students are viewed more favorably than others. But in many urban institutions students have full-time jobs and family responsibilities, making it impossible to complete degrees in the usually prescribed framework. Eventually, they do so. Or a bachelor's degree holder enrolls at a community college for a few specialized courses, completes them and moves on. Because of current limitations, retention and attrition data do not properly account for these cases. Some inventive and imaginative solutions are needed to enable institutions to reflect more accurately the varieties of students they serve and to broaden the bases for educational budgeting and funding.

On the matter of computer science, many institutions, and not just small ones, are somewhat panicky about losing out in the race to establish major programs. Certainly computers are an important new instrument in education, but not every institution needs to have a major or even a major investment in them, at least until there is a broader base of experience to draw upon than now exists. More than one evaluation team has cautioned an institution this year about the old trap of trying to be all things to all people.

Evaluation teams have also been especially critical about advising, counselling, and placement in their reports this year. Academic advising, usually considered a faculty responsibility, is not being done well and in some cases just not being done. Collective bargaining seems to be a factor in a few cases – if the contract doesn't specify it, it's not required –, but that does not apply to the majority of institutions. Personal and psychological counselling also have been found wanting, and here budgetary cuts have taken their toll. Placement and career counselling are not well developed on many campuses, although some institutions see this area as an important factor in student recruitment and thus concentrate on it.

What has been surprising has been the slowness with which colleges and universities have realized that student retention can be an important budgetary factor. The placidity with which many campuses have accepted fifty, sixty, and even seventy per cent attrition between the entering and graduation years is astonishing. In this case, their grasp of the obvious has been less than profound. Attitudes are changing, and improved advising, counselling, and placement should facilitate that change.

There is clearly a crying need to do a better job of analyzing students' goals and aspirations. If students don't want to learn or can't, all our other efforts go for nil. Cultural, sociological, and economic conditioning must be grappled with before teaching, even good teaching, can begin to take effect. Merely because students arrive on a particular campus is no basis for assuming that they have the goals the faculty think they should have. As colleges and universities continue moving toward more effective measures in assessing outcomes, student expectations and needs will have to be better understood. And that will require more available and skillful advising and counselling than is currently prevalent.

One of the reasons for the foregoing situation is the steadily rising number of part-time faculty in virtually every institution, and not only in off-campus programs or highly specialized and esoteric subjects. Several institutions seeking specialized accreditation have shifted full-time slots to satisfy prescriptive criteria established by professional bodies, inevitably at the expense of the humanities and less populated disciplines.

An institution makes an important statement through the commitment of its human and fiscal resources. In its document on "Conditions and Responsibilities of Professional Employment in Higher Education", the Commission has stated:

> The use of part-time or adjunct faculty requires policy statements as carefully considered and explicated as those for full-time faculty. People with unusual talents or experience, or with special qualifications, may be available only on a limited basis, and institutions may enhance the quality and strength of their programs by employing such people as needed.
>
> There is no precise formula for determining the balance between full-time and part-time faculty, but several significant factors should be carefully weighed in establishing institutional policy. Part-time faculty usually accept teaching appointments as a commitment secondary to other responsibilities. Consequently, they do not have the time to devote to committees, counselling, and other normal faculty duties. The full-time faculty bears an increased burden in these areas as the proportion of part-time faculty rises, with direct implications for the morale and effectiveness of the full-time faculty. Problems of stability, continuity, and ultimately of institutional quality are also inherent in extensive use of part-time faculty.
>
> While short-term economies may be effected through use of adjuncts, the long-range implications must always be considered. An institution employing faculty on a part-time basis has a special obligation to explain its rationale for doing so and to demonstrate that its procedures for assuring effective quality control are well defined and systematically applied.

The issue could hardly be stated more succinctly or aptly.

On a more positive note, faculty concern for writing appears to be progressing beyond lamentation and pious condemnation of the admissions office or the English department. A number of institutions are strongly committed to writing-across-the-curriculum programs, holding students accountable for the effective use of English in every discipline at every level. Unless and until this is standard practice in all degree granting institutions, we will doubtless continue to hear complaints about illiteracy from employers as well as graduate and professional schools.

More disquieting among team findings in public institutions, especially community colleges, is the continued politicization of Boards of Trustees. Interference in administrative affairs and political intrusions into personnel selection have surfaced on several campuses. At its February 1984 meeting the Commission considered the situation sufficiently serious to adopt a strong statement on "Political Intervention in Education". Copies are available from the Commission office, but the heart of the statement bears repeating here:

> A college or university must be sensitive to the conditions of the society in which it exists but it must also be free to determine how to be most responsive and responsible. Political interference in the affairs of an educational institution presents a profound threat to its freedom and effectiveness. Direct intervention by governors, legislators, political parties, or pressure groups in the selection of faculty, the determination of curricula, textbooks, or course content, or in admissions and retention policies, invariably injects factors which are irrelevant and often inimical to the fulfillment of an institution's mission and goals. In the matter of appointments, for example, political control at any level results in

> divided loyalty and weakened authority. To impose political considerations upon faculty selection and retention harms an institution intellectually and educationally, not only by reducing its options in the recruitment of talent, but also by creating pressures against dissent on important policy issues. When political considerations which have nothing to do with the functions of the office determine the selection of trustees or similar officers, they impose unneeded restrictions on choice. Moreover, appointments based on political grounds entail external liaisons which may militate against the educational purposes of the institution. If the tenure of an educational administrator is subject to the wishes or whims of political partisans, or if appointments to the board of trustees or the faculty are made only with regard to their political implications, the institution may be weakened and its prospects for excellence seriously diminished.

Accountability and meddling are not synonymous and should never be tolerated as such.

In private institutions a very different problem has emerged as evaluators have analyzed fiscal affairs. The conservatism of institutional investment policies, or occasionally the absence of any policy, is cheating some colleges out of vital income. One college with an endowment of $5,000,000 earned barely $350,000 a year for several years when interest rates could easily have added at least another $150,000 annually. A Board of Trustees which permits that to happen is simply failing to filfill its fiduciary responsibilities. Fund raising is a related area where too many Boards are not alert to their obligations, and that is as true of the public as the private sector. Tuition dependency has been rising steadily in all educational budgets, but there are limits. There should be no limits on the initiative and imagination of Trustees in striving to strengthen the financial viability of the institutions they serve.

Some Further Thoughts

Committees are the apparatus of academia, but too often they are overused and underproductive. As we travel from campus to campus we find faculties and administrators literally almost committeed to death. Of course committees are useful and even important, but most institutions could benefit from careful review of their committee structures and scrupulous streamlining of their procedures. Charges should be sharpened, members schooled in what committees are supposed to do and how to do it, and function clarified as to whether advisory or policy-making – these are minimal steps needed, and probably one more: every committee should be required periodically to justify its continuation.

Institutional planning could profit from similar attention. Most faculty and many administrators need training in planning – what it is, why it's necessary, what types of planning are applicable and appropriate, who should be involved, what kinds of data and information are needed and how to use them. To begin with the assumption that everyone knows the principles of good planning is practically to guarantee that the planning won't be good. The Commission has been encouraged by the rising level of sophistication in institutional planning, particularly as more institutions relate it to self-study and the evaluation process. Suffice to say that there's a lot more work to do in this vital area.

We have been surprised by the vehemence and defensiveness of several institutional responses to evaluation team reports this year, particularly when the teams questioned the adequacy and realism of planning. Even where the tone and essence of the evaluation were positive, sensitivities were quick to surface and claims strongly stated that "the team didn't understand us." We would quietly suggest that when a team of experienced and objective visitors shares its perceptions and judgments in good faith and fully in accord with Commission procedures, it behooves the institution to analyze them honestly and dispassionately and with a willingness to learn. As George Keller has observed in his book on **Strategic Planning**, lack of willingness to consider hard facts re the future of higher education, fuzziness about mission and goals, lack of distinctive characteristic(s), inability to contemplate future problems will be tougher if institutions don't than if they do face up to hard facts.

A Word About Archives

To a once and future historian the lack of an archival sense on most campuses is appalling. Very few institutions have established policies for systematically collecting important documents and records. Not infrequently, the Commission office

receives frantic telephone calls from institutions in need of documentation about their accredited status at a certain point in time to satisfy a foundation, a state licensing authority, or a federal agency. Copies of self-studies and evaluation team reports are unfindable, at least in the locations where they would normally be expected. The Commission retains copies of each institution's self-study until superseded in the next evaluation cycle, at which time the report is returned to the institution. In most cases, it is received gladly, and only occasionally is a copy refused.

The Importance of archival policy pertains to all of an institution's vital records and not only to accreditation. We would urge each institution to review its procedures and to assure systematic attention to its archives.

Theological Education

The Commission on Higher Education accredits 25 free-standing theological seminaries in the Middle States region and several others are parts of accredited colleges and universities. A number are jointly accredited by Middle States and the Association of Theological Schools in a cooperative arrangement which generally works quite well.

Several of the seminaries have been evaluated over the past couple of years. During the same time a study of Catholic seminaries in the United States commissioned by the Vatican has also been going on. There is no relation between the two directly, but some questions have been raised about both Protestant and Catholic seminaries which are worth noting. The majority of seminaries are small both in numbers of students and of faculty, and many are leanly funded as a result of modest endowments and equally modest church support. Some seminaries have good and even outstanding specialized libraries, but all are struggling with ever-rising costs and the pressures of remaining current, and they are losing ground.

Academically, theological education requires a lengthy commitment, a Master of Divinity degree, for example, usually requiring 90 or more credits for completion. The number of degrees awarded by many seminaries is confused by what appear at times to be unnecessary duplication and puzzling prerequisites. Many seminarians, particularly in the Protestant denominations, have parish responsibilities which equate to full-time positions, placing heavy stress and strain on personal and family life and inevitably affecting the quality of scholarship. The role of women in seminaries is still uncertain, ranging from full acceptance as administrators, faculty and students to virtual exclusion.

At a time when all other higher educational institutions are of necessity re-examining their missions and goals and reassessing their resources accordingly, this would appear to be a particularly propitious moment for religious seminaries to do the same.

State Relations

One of the purposes of the sub-regional meetings which were so well attended in the Fall was to achieve closure on a policy statement on state relations. Consultations were also held with the responsible education departments in each state as well as in the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. The result was "A Statement on Working Relations Between State Agencies and the Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools" approved by the Commission on February 26, 1984. In effect, the statement formalizes the procedures followed with minor variations in each of the political jurisdictions in which the Commission works.

In general, working relations with the states remain good. After about a year of some tension between the Commission and the office of the Chancellor of Higher Education in New Jersey the situation was amicably resolved, thanks in large part to the effective support and cooperation of the New Jersey Association of Independent Colleges and Universities and the New Jersey Association of Colleges and Universities. There are growing signs of trouble between long-established colleges and universities in the District of Columbia and the D.C. Educational Institution Licensure Commission. That situation will bear watching.

Council on Postsecondary Accreditation (COPA)

COPA has continued to move forward in its consideration of substantive issues as they affect institutions and accreditation. Two major committees, one on disclosure and confidentiality and a second on institutional rights and responsibilities in accreditation, are expected to make what should be very important reports in the coming year.

Project ALLTEL reached its climax on May 31, 1984 with a national teleconference which provided an unusual opportunity to share its findings and recommendations. If or when institutions decide to undertake educational activities via television and other media, valuable guidelines and assistance will be available.

A second major project, on the development of a common data base for institutions and accrediting bodies, has received additional funding from the Ford Foundation and so this important work will continue. The prospect of achieving a uniform format for institutional data reports promises substantial benefits for all parties and represents one of the more exciting endeavors of recent years.

One other function of COPA is its service as a clearinghouse for the steadily expanding literature on accreditation. A number of dissertations have been written recently on various facets of accreditation, while other studies, articles and even books have been appearing with increasing regularity. Anyone interested in reading or writing about accreditation is well advised to consult the COPA clearinghouse.

Study Abroad

Under the distinguished and able leadership of Margaret Matson, the Commission's study abroad evaluation project continues to make its mark in the field of international education. In the light of our discovery that summer study abroad programs appear to differ somewhat from those conducted during the regular academic year, ten CHE representatives are scheduled in July 1984 to visit 50 separate programs sponsored by 33 institutions in England, France and Spain. This will bring to 163 the number of programs (sponsored by 78 different institutions) to be reviewed in the four years since this activity began. With few exceptions the regular academic year programs have been found quite satisfactory, and that is our hope for the summer programs as well. The Commission and all Middle States institutions are deeply indebted to Dr. Matson for her outstanding work.

Policy Review

In accord with Commission requirements, all policies and procedures were carefully reviewed and where necessary revised during this past year. In most cases changes were editorial rather than substantive. What stands out impressively from this review is the range of the Commission's concerns and responsibilities. A new edition of **Policies and Procedures** will be available in early fall and should make instructive reading for anyone concerned with the quality and integrity of higher education.

Finale

No annual report, no matter how comprehensive or detailed, could accurately convey the quantity of work performed by and for the Commission on Higher Education in the year just ended. More than 600 faculty members and administrators, from a variety of institutions both within and outside the Middle States region, devoted countless hours to making the accrediting process work. A scholar takes time away from a demanding research project, a college or university president agrees to the heavy responsibility of chairing a team thus adding to other already heavy responsibilities, and hundreds like them participate in what has to be one of the nation's great voluntary enterprises.

A statement adopted by the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, made up of the chief academic officers of eleven Midwestern teaching and research universities, recognized its importance on March 14, 1984 by adopting "Accreditation: A Statement of Principles" in which the following appears:

> External reviews of academic programs are a useful and valuable means of protecting quality in higher education. They can generate suggestions for program improvement that are both specific and practical. Often, too, the stimulation they give to institutional

self-examination will produce improvements beyond those recommended by the accrediting body. Finally, the process of accreditation is itself a promoter of useful discussion about quality, standards, and performance in higher education.

For all of these reasons, even the strongest universities have an obligation to do their part to make accreditation work. To do so effectively, however, they must be able to argue that the accreditation process is fundamentally sound. They face a painful dilemma when they conclude that a particular accrediting agency has exceeded its competence or is using standards that relate less to quality of education than to disciplinary or professional self-interest. They can, of course, consider the option of withdrawing. Even when that is feasible, it can only be viewed as a last resort. The best universities cannot withdraw from any accreditation process without damaging their credibility and the respect accorded to them by other institutions.

In the final analysis, the commitment of institutions and the quality of the people who participate in the accrediting process are what make it work.

The Commission also had the privilege in December of hosting a group of four educators from Taiwan for three weeks and the Taiwan Vice Minister of Education and his Science Advisor for a briefer period in December. It was stimulating to have questions and comments about the Middle States way of doing things posed from a different perspective. We learned from them and would be remiss if we did not acknowledge their visit and thank them for coming.

Aesop once taught that gratitude is the sign of noble souls. If that is the case the Commission's Staff is truly ennobled, for we are deeply grateful to each member of the Commission for his or her loyal support, diligence, and for their friendship and good company as well. Under the admired and admirable chairing of Bruce Dearing, the Commission has had an unusually productive and rewarding year. Special thanks go to our financial experts whose insights have added important dimensions to our understanding of the financial condition of many institutions: Thomas Hawk of the Community College of Philadelphia, Jack Mullins formerly of the College Board, and Harold Myers, Vice President Emeritus of Drexel University. Dorothy Heindel, Howard Simmons, and Minna Weinstein continue to perform at awesome levels of excellence and productivity. Indeed, most people are incredulous on learning that a total professional Staff of four people serves the Commission on Higher Education. Happily, Jacqueline Ciminera will become a fifth member of the professional Staff on July 1, 1984, and we look forward to her contribution to our always challenging and exciting work.

As the Bible says, "In all things give thanks". And so we do.

Respectfully submitted,

Robert Kirkwood

Robert Kirkwood
Executive Director

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[1] Sir Arthur Helps, *Friends in Council*

[2] Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *To Virgil*

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